

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

A LUDDITE LEADER

In the small village of Marsden-in-Saddleworth, located in the West Riding Yorkshire, a group of cloth workers and finishers came together in the year 1812. Frustrated by the introduction of new machinery that threatened their livelihoods, they formed a secret society with the sole purpose of destroying the machines that were bringing about their downfall. Their actions sparked a series of riots that spread throughout the district, targeting the mills of the manufacturers.

Under the cover of darkness, the rioters attacked the mills, wreaking havoc and causing destruction. Chaos ensued, and the once peaceful village was filled with fear and uncertainty. The manufacturers offered substantial rewards for the capture of the individuals responsible for the attacks, hoping to bring an end to the violence and protect their businesses.

Amidst the turmoil, a young man arrived at a lonely public house at the bottom of "Stony Bonk." He appeared weary and worn-out, seeking refuge for the night. The next morning, instead of rushing to continue his journey, he lingered, inquiring about work opportunities among the local farmers. The innkeeper, observing his reluctance to interact with strangers, grew curious about the newcomer.

One day, a traveler from Yorkshire stopped by the inn during lunchtime. Engrossed in the recent news, he pulled out a newspaper and began reading aloud the accounts of the Luddite apprehensions. As the young man listened intently, a sudden change came over his face—a chilling pallor and a look of fear. Sensing something amiss, the traveler became suspicious of the young man's reaction.

Dropping his knife and fork, the young man's secrets seemed exposed. The traveler made a swift decision to act upon his intuition without revealing his suspicions to anyone. He immediately set off for Heptonstall, a nearby village, to locate the constable and share his story. Together, they returned to the inn, determined to confront the mysterious stranger.

The constable, armed with the traveler's account, approached the young man and informed him of the accusations. Faced with undeniable evidence, the young man confessed to his participation in the destructive riots. Recognized by others who had witnessed his involvement, he was taken into custody and eventually stood trial in York. The trial was swift, and the young man, along with fourteen or fifteen others, was found guilty of his crimes. The penalty for their actions was death. The hangings served as a grim reminder of the consequences of participating in such foolish and destructive riots. The village of Marsden-in-Saddleworth slowly began to heal in the aftermath of the Luddite uprising. The manufacturers, though relieved by the capture and punishment of the guilty parties, remained cautious and continued to implement the new machinery that had sparked the unrest. The cloth workers and finishers faced a changing world, one where technology increasingly played a role in their trade.

Over time, the Luddite riots became a cautionary tale, a reminder of the dangers of resisting progress and technological advancements. While their cause was born out of desperation and fear, their methods only brought destruction and sorrow. The tale of the young man who sought refuge at the inn serves as a grim reminder that even in the darkest of times, the truth has a way of surfacing, and justice will prevail.

By Donald Jay